United Nations S/PV.5701

Security Council

Sixty-second year

Provisional

5701st meeting

Wednesday, 20 June 2007, 10.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Verbeke	(Belgium)
Members:	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Ghana	Mr. Yankey
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Spatafora
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Peru	Mr. Chávez
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Shcherbak
	Slovakia	Mr. Mlynár
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Williams
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

07-38897 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Michael C. Williams, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Williams to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Michael C. Williams, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Williams: The Council is meeting today at a time of crisis in the Middle East. The violent seizure of de facto political authority in Gaza by Hamas, the end of the Palestinian National Unity Government and the declaration of a state of emergency by President Abbas have created new political realities and worrying conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory. In Lebanon, renewed violence has again threatened the nation's stability. Israel has been subject to rocket attacks, on both its southern and northern borders. The region as a whole is highly volatile and unstable, overshadowing efforts to make political progress.

The figures of the past month tell a gloomy story: 218 Palestinians have been killed and 910 injured in internal violence; 40 Palestinians have been killed and 159 injured by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF); one Israeli, a 13-year old quadriplegic boy, has been killed and 10 other Israelis have been injured, in attacks by Palestinian militants. At least 166 rockets have been fired by Palestinian militants from Gaza into Israel, and 77 mortars have been launched at the Erez crossing. There have been a total of 37 Israeli air strikes, and some ground operations into the Gaza Strip, as well as a total of 363 Israeli incursions into, and 287 arrests in, the West Bank.

The events in Gaza must necessarily be the central focus of this briefing. Since the February Mecca agreement, it has been plain that the Palestinian National Unity Government faced enormous obstacles. The agreement did not lead to the integration of common security and political structures. Nor did it lead to a lifting of Israeli and international measures against the Palestinian Authority Government in place following the January 2006 elections.

On 27 May, Egypt brokered a factional truce after bitter fighting in Gaza. That violence had also drawn in Israel, which had responded with targeted air operations to intense rocket attacks by Hamas militants against its civilian population. President Abbas proposed, and the National Unity Government endorsed, a ceasefire plan designed to ensure calm with Israel throughout Gaza and the West Bank. That plan did not materialize.

Matters were swiftly overtaken by the events of last week. Between 9 and 15 June, Hamas's military wing and the Executive Force security organization took control of the Gaza Strip in a violent insurrection against the presidency and the Palestinian Authority security forces. The Hamas operations were well planned and executed, and Hamas fighters took over key security and strategic sites. Presidential forces were outperformed, as were Fatah militants. During the fighting, there were many grave violations of humanitarian and human rights law. The fighting included summary executions, attacks on hospitals and, at least in one case, the killing of an individual by throwing him off a building to his death. Premises of Palestinian Authority security forces and institutions were burned or looted, including the presidential compound. Additionally, three United Nations vehicles were stolen at gunpoint by presidential forces, but those vehicles have now been returned.

Inevitably, the fighting has created some population movement, including hundreds of Fatah militants and ordinary civilians who have sought to flee the violence. About 3,500 Palestinians, including some who were denied entry into Egypt, are reported to be awaiting re-entry into Gaza through the Rafah

crossing. Another 250 people, some of whom are wounded or injured, are waiting at the Erez terminal for permission to cross through Israel to the West Bank. They are receiving assistance from the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the IDF.

The situation at the Rafah and Erez crossings still awaits resolution and raises increasing concerns about protection, particularly as many children are involved. We have, however, had reports today of several seriously ill Palestinians being allowed entry into Israel.

The fighting in Gaza inevitably had repercussions in the West Bank. There were clashes in Nablus and in Ramallah, and elsewhere Hamas supporters and officials were detained. President Abbas called for a halt to all such violent acts, including reprisals against Hamas members.

On 14 June, President Abbas dismissed Prime Minister Haniyeh, which led to the dissolution of the Government. He declared a state of emergency for 30 days, in accordance with the Palestinian Basic Law, and appointed Salam Fayyad to serve as Prime Minister, and concurrently as Foreign Minister and Finance Minister, leading an emergency Government of 11 independents, mainly technocrats. President Abbas said that he planned to consult the Palestinian people at the appropriate time.

Meanwhile, within the Gaza Strip, the situation remains tense. Today marks the hundredth day of captivity for the BBC journalist Alan Johnston. Hamas militants surrounded the compound of the Doghmush clan on 18 June, where it is believed Mr. Johnston is being held. There have been no reports of progress in the efforts to secure the release of Israeli Corporal Shalit, who in five days time will have been captive for one year. We are troubled by reports of harassment of Gaza's small Christian minority. This morning, we have also received reports of at least one rocket attack into Israel.

At the height of the crisis, the Secretary-General convened a teleconference of the Quartet principals on 15 June. In addition to sharing its great concern for the welfare and security of all Palestinians, the Quartet expressed understanding and support for President Abbas's necessary and legitimate actions and noted its continuing support for other legitimate Palestinian institutions. Arab foreign ministers meeting in Cairo sent a strong message of support to President Abbas, as did the Council of the European Union.

With the formation of the Government, the United States and the European Union announced their intention to renew direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority. Those decisions signalled the legitimacy of the new Government and the fact that President Abbas's positions are consistent with those of the Quartet. The Secretary-General telephoned President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad to convey his full support to the new Government. In a welcome development, in a meeting on 17 June, Prime Minister Olmert of Israel assured the Secretary-General that Israel was examining options for the resumption of transfers of VAT and customs revenues, and was planning to ease substantially movement restrictions in the West Bank.

With the situation in Gaza stabilizing to some extent, concerns about food and medical shortages are mounting. Reopening the crossings for commercial and humanitarian imports is the United Nations most immediate humanitarian concern. Our estimates indicate that commercial stocks of basic food items, such as flour and rice, will begin to run out in three weeks unless imports are resumed. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme, the main humanitarian providers in Gaza, have between seven and ten days' worth of food reserves for distribution. Dairy and other fresh products are already in short supply. Yesterday and again today, small quantities of immediate food and medical relief were provided by Israel, the United Nations and the ICRC through the Kerem Shalom crossing for targeted distribution to recipients and suppliers. A relief shipment is scheduled to arrive from Jordan tomorrow. Those are welcome steps, but I must emphasize that overall food and essential commodity reserves are declining by the day. That can be reversed only by a resumption of imports through the Karni crossing.

All parties have expressed their desire to ensure that basic supplies continue to reach the people of Gaza. We welcome the fact that Israel has resumed fuel shipments for the power plant and petrol stations. Concrete steps by the parties must be taken now to reopen the crossings. We are working to find the arrangements that will enable the parties to make that happen, as called for by the Secretary-General and the Quartet.

Allow me now briefly to refer to other developments. This has been an important month in Israeli politics. On 13 June, the Knesset elected Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres as Israel's ninth president. He will assume his functions in a month. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak was elected as the Chairman of the Labour Party on 12 June and assumed his duties as Israel's Defence Minister on 19 June.

Israeli settlement activity continued, including new construction near the Dead Sea and in the northern West Bank, in violation of the road map. Barrier construction also continued in occupied territory, notwithstanding the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Obstacles to movement in the West Bank now number 553.

I visited Syria on 14 June and was received by the Vice-President, the Foreign Minister and other senior officials. The Syrian Government impressed on me its desire to see the start of negotiations leading to peace with Israel and expressing concern at increasing regional stability. In conversations with both Israeli and Syrian interlocutors, I was assured that there was no interest in breaking the decades of calm which have prevailed across the Israeli-Syrian armistice line.

I also joined the Secretary-General for his recent meeting with Prime Minister Olmert, at which he underscored his desire to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza, work with President Abbas, and pursue opportunities for peace in the region with all Arab States in light of the Arab peace initiative.

I now turn to the situation in Lebanon, where the security situation continues to be unstable and deteriorated further during the reporting period. The explosions in and around Beirut have continued. On 13 June, Walid Eido — a member of Parliament and of Saad Hariri's Future Movement — his son, two bodyguards and six other people were murdered in an assassination reminiscent of the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Lebanon throughout 2005. The Secretary-General condemned the attack in the strongest possible terms and called on the Lebanese Government to bring to justice the perpetrators and instigators of that crime. Following an exchange of letters between the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, and at the request of the Lebanese Government, the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission has started to extend its assistance to the Lebanese authorities in their investigation of that latest crime.

In the North of Lebanon, for more than five weeks now the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have continued intense fighting against militants of the Fatah al-Islam group in the Nahr al-Barid camp. To date, 76 LAF soldiers have died in the fighting, while the number of civilian fatalities is estimated to be around 50. Humanitarian conditions in the neighbouring Beddawi camp remain difficult. However, UNRWA, supported by United Nations agencies and relief organizations, reports that food and non-food items, as well as medical supplies, are sufficient to meet current needs.

I am pleased to report that the international community has responded promptly and fully to the recently launched UNRWA flash appeal for $12.7 million, which will help sustain humanitarian stocks. In addition, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has approved a $12-million grant for cash assistance to displaced families from Nahr al-Barid and families from the Beddawi camp. Overcrowding, together with public health issues, are now the main challenges.

Following the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1757 (2007) regarding the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, and given that, as of 10 June, the United Nations was not notified in writing by the Government of Lebanon that the legal requirements for entry into force had been complied with, the provisions of the document annexed to the resolution have entered into force. The Secretary-General has begun to undertake steps and measures necessary to establish the Special Tribunal in a timely manner, in coordination with the Government of Lebanon whenever appropriate.

On 17 June, two Katyusha rockets fired from southern Lebanon landed in Kiryat Shmona, in northern Israel, causing minor damage but claiming no casualties. LAF and UNIFIL troops quickly deployed to the area but found no suspects at the site. UNIFIL was in immediate contact with senior interlocutors in both the LAF and the IDF to contain the situation. The attack is a most serious violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

The Secretary-General strongly deplored the attack, which he characterized as an attempt to destabilize Lebanon, and urged all involved parties to exercise restraint. The offices of Prime Minister

Siniora and Speaker Berri issued separate statements condemning the attack and expressed support for UNIFIL and the LAF. UNIFIL-led talks concerning the marking of the Blue Line continued in the current reporting period within the tripartite mechanism. At the same time, there were an increased number of Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace.

The brutal violence in Gaza and the attacks on the legitimate institutions of President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority Government are totally unacceptable and should be condemned. Those developments have generated deep sadness and shock among the vast majority of Palestinians. The Secretary-General regrets the failure of the National Unity Government and condemns the violence that brought about its demise.

Despite what has happened, Gaza and the West Bank remain one Palestinian territory, legally administered by one Palestinian Authority, headed by President Abbas, who has appointed an emergency Government led by Prime Minister Fayyad.

It is now vital that political and financial support from the international community and from Israel be immediately delivered to President Abbas and the Palestinian Government, starting with the release of all withheld Palestinian VAT and customs receipts. What is also needed is action on previous Israeli commitments, including the evacuation of settlement outposts, the removal of roadblocks and checkpoints, and the release of prisoners. Equally, Fatah and the Palestinian Authority should act on their previous commitments not only to end violence, but also to reform their institutions.

In Gaza, it is clear that the United Nations has a key role to play in addressing a myriad of challenges, none more pressing than the reopening of the crossings. I call on all not to allow this vital humanitarian issue to be overshadowed by political considerations. The people of Gaza cannot be left isolated, and all parties have indicated their desire to ensure that this issue is addressed. Concrete solutions are now needed.

In addition to these immediate issues, two larger political challenges remain: first, how to restore the unity of the Palestinian Authority and people, and prevent the de facto division between Gaza and the West Bank; and, secondly, how to advance the political process between Israel and the Palestinians and move towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is the responsibility of all — the parties, the regional States and the international community, including the Quartet — to provide the kind of leadership required to steer through this difficult period towards a more hopeful future. The Secretary-General is hoping that the Quartet will meet soon.

I wish to conclude this briefing by paying tribute to the United Nations team on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories and, above all, in Gaza. Two United Nations staff, Abdel-Fatah Abu-Ghali and Ahmad Al-Laham, were killed on 13 June, and others were injured serving the people of Gaza. While operations had to be curtailed, they never ceased entirely. Even at the time of heaviest fighting, the United Nations remained with the Palestinian people in Gaza. I wish to salute in particular the dedication of the Director of UNRWA in Gaza and the Chief Security Adviser, as well as the international security officers and national staff who remained at their posts throughout the height of the fighting. The United Nations will remain fully engaged in meeting its mandated responsibilities in the occupied Palestinian territory and in efforts to advance the cause of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I thank Mr. Williams for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.